LEADERSHIP & THE SELECTION PROCESS

Traditionally USACE, like most organizations, has not focused on the candidate's leadership and development abilities in the selection of supervisors, managers and executives. Our focus has been primarily on the candidate's technical and management abilities. Leadership (the capability to inspire, motivate, articulate vision, think strategically) and Development (the ability to build team, develop talent, manage and value the diverse gifts individuals, position people for success) are largely ignored in government selections for key leadership positions (MSPB study, First Line Supervisors - How Good Are They?).

We know that effective leaders make the difference. Leadership judgments in emergency situations, key leader decisions for project success, creating corporate buy-in for critical initiatives, building the talent base of the workforce, developing cohesive teams that make the most of the strengths of their members, etc. are a function of who the leader is. The leader's talents are key to effective mission accomplishment.

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY STUDY

We began with the assumption that leadership in the Corps can be defined. We set out to define it in terms of critical leadership competencies, and we called this research the Leadership Competency Study. We believed that before we could insert leadership into the selection system, or any personnel management system, we had to understand what we meant by "leadership." The leadership competency study was designed to behaviorally describe leadership in terms of critical leader competencies. Additionally, a baseline profile of executive Corps leadership as described by these critical competencies would enable us to measure our progress over time.

The Leadership Competency Study provided us with a definition of leadership in terms of critical competencies and a baseline profile of Corps leadership. The results of the study included:

-- 19 Competencies that define Corps unique leader requirements.

-- A common leadership language in terms of competencies, a way to discuss and recognize leadership.

-- Leadership Competency Interview - a structured interview to measure individual strengths on the competencies.

-- Initial indications of validity - a higher total score on the interview indicates stronger overall leadership talent.

-- An understanding of the depth of talent we have - Best of the Corps leaders meet or exceed talent of best leaders Gallup had studied in the private sector (1988 Gallup data base of 4,000 executives).

-- Gallup found some talent not being used - that there is talent all through the Corps, but not necessarily positioned to be most effective.

We further assumed, that once defined, leadership can be measured, and we had a measurement tool (a structured interview) with preliminary evidence of validity. But we also had many unanswered questions. We set out to test the interview and its use in the Corps, and simultaneously impact leadership while we were testing. We called this research the Executive Selection Pilot.

EXECUTIVE SELECTION PILOT

Purpose - Provide a validated tool for adding a consideration of leadership to the selection process. Help long term development of Corps leadership strengths through near term use of leadership competencies and structured interviews in selecting Corps leaders today.

Goals of the Pilot

-- Integrate a consideration of leadership into the selection process.

-- Broaden the understanding of leadership competencies and the importance of selecting for leadership talent.

Test the interview process for:

-- Validity
-- Reliability
-- Stability
-- Usefulness to selecting officials
-- Added Value
-- EEO implications

The intent of the Pilot was to educate, impact and collect data in the process. Formal education was provided through the Selecting Official Workshops. At the same time, interest and understanding was generated through use of the interview process in selections. With their interest piqued, many Corps members opted to learn more on their own. To summarize:

--8 Selecting Official Seminars were conducted and 191 members   were trained in the use of the interview process.

-- 115 Corps members attended the Varsity Management Seminar at Gallup, Inc. for their individual development.

-- A total of 546 Leadership Competency Interviews were conducted. Each interviewee received narrative feedback on his/her strengths.

The Leadership Competency Interview was used to identify leadership talent for 42 leadership positions. Those selected using the interview had significantly higher
leadership scores than those non-selected. The non-selected group consisted of the 3 to 7 candidates under final consideration for a selection.

-- 143 individuals participated in learning about how their leadership is perceived by their peers, direct reports and supervisors. They distributed a total of 2,690 surveys, and received summarized feedback of these ratings.

The methodology pursued provided sufficient data to evaluate the Leadership Competency Interview. Key data points include:

-- The Leadership Competency Interview can be used effectively by Corps selecting officials.

-- Selecting Officials using the interview for selections rated the interview process effective, and used the interview report in making their decision. Sixty percent indicated the interview should be used for all leadership positions and 40 percent indicated it should be used for some critical positions.

-- The Leadership Competency Interview is neutral to minorities and females.

-- There is no significant difference between the scores of non-minorities, minorities and women on the interview.

-- The Leadership Competency Interview is valid.

-- The interview correlates significantly with both the original and newly identified performance groups.

-- The interview correlates significantly with the ratings of leadership behaviors by direct reports, supervisors and self.

-- The Leadership Competency Interview is reliable.

-- The Kuder-Richardson measure of internal consistency is in the acceptable range.

-- The Leadership Competency Interview is relatively stable over time.   A re-interview of 41 SES after 3 years elapsed showed responses to 81% of the items did not appreciably change.

ISSUES - During the Pilot several issues were raised regarding the interview and its use. Some of these have been addressed through the Pilot process.

IS IT FAIR?

It is neutral to minorities, women and non-minorities. There is no significant difference between their scores.

SOME INTERVIEW QUESTIONS SEEM INAPPROPRIATE FOR A JOB INTERVIEW.

The interview has been reconfigured to be efficient and powerful. As part of this reconfiguration, all items were reviewed, and items that were judged questionable for the federal environment (using the "Washington Post Test") were removed.

CAN WE USE THIS INTERVIEW (DEVELOPED ON 1988 LEADERSHIP) TO SELECT FOR WHAT WE NEED IN THE FUTURE?

Improvements in leadership begin by building on current strengths. However, as part of the validation process, we have revalidated the future model of leadership by identifying new performance groups.

The original interview was modeled on a performance group identified in 1988. Six senior leaders identified a new performance group. The original and reconfigured interviews both correlate significantly with these performance groups. Thus, there is some continuity in what the Corps views as effective leadership. We also have the flexibility through this process to reconfigure the interview as we develop our leadership talent in the future - to develop our measure with our talent.

IS GALLUP THE ONLY CONTRACTOR?

In the federal government there is a necessity to be defensible about any new tool we introduce. A tool that is used in selection must be shown to be valid and fair for the situation/population to which it is being applied. Ironically, when we apply the criterion of defensibility, the LCI is the only tool we can use today. Other tools may become available later after the same kind of research and study, but, until then, the LCI is the only one we've tested.

The ten years we've invested in research show that the LCI is a valid, reliable tool that can be used effectively in the Corps. We believe it would take another 2 to 5 years to check other alternatives through other vendors since any other tool would require similar research.

Gallup, Inc. is a respected research organization in management selection and surveys who stands behind their products. The LCI is based not only on their work with the Corps, but also upon their data base of over 4,000 executives. Their interview process has never been successfully challenged in court. During the implementation time-frame, we are open to other Corps members' efforts in helping us learn about other research/tools. We see the leader selection process as one that will undergo continuous evaluation/improvement, as it has already done through the reconfiguring of the LCI.

IT COSTS TOO MUCH

The average cost per selection was $3,500. This is an inconsequential amount compared with the dollar and performance impact of placing the best leader in leadership positions.